Application of Rasa Theory to the Selected Plays of Chandrashekhar Kambar and Mahesh Dattani

Synopsis

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"Literature, like other arts, is essentially an imaginative act, that is, an act of the writer's imagination in selecting, ordering, and interpreting life-experience" (Taylor, 1).

India has a rich tradition of drama from ancient times. It is a land of several types of dramas in several languages. Drama in India begins its journey with Sanskrit plays. Indian traditions are preserved in *The Natyaśāstra,* the oldest text on the theory of drama. This text claims the divine origin of drama and a close connection with the sacred *Vedas* themselves. The origin of Indian drama can be traced to the ancient rules and seasonal festivities of the Vedic Aryans. The dramatic performances of those times mainly included events like the depiction of events of daily life accompanied by music. There are references to drama in Patanjali's *Mahabhashya*, as well as Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* and Panini's *Astādhyāyī*. Thus, the origin of Sanskrit drama dates back to the 1000 century BC.

The most celebrated dramatists of the ancient era are Aśvaghosh, Bhāsa, Shudraka, Kalidas, Harsha, Bhavabhuti, Visakhadatta, Bhattanarayana and Rajeshekhara, who enriched Indian theatre with their works like *Madhyamavyayoga, Urubhanga, Karnabharam, Mrcchakatikam, Abhigyana Shakuntalam, Mālāvikāgnimitram, Uttararamacaritam, Mudrarakshasa, Bhagavadajjukam, Mattavilasa Prahasana* and so on. The supreme achievement of Indian drama undoubtedly lies in Kalidas who is often called the Shakespeare of India. The Sanskrit drama flourished in its glory till the 12th century. The plays of Sanskrit tradition were performed on stage till the 15th century in Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat but thereafter, Indian dramatic activities almost ceased due to foreign invasions. The beginning of *Loknatya* (people's theatre) is noticed in every state of India from the 17th century onwards.

Indian English drama dates back to the 18th century when British rule became stable in India. British brought with them, the theatre. But during the initial decades of their rule, they could not present English drama due to the unawareness of Indians regarding the English language. Hence, a lot of English plays, like those of Shakespeare were translated into Indian languages and then presented before the Indians. Gradually, western education made its way to India. As a result, Indian English drama came into existence.

English drama in India was started by Krishna Mohan Banerjee with his work *The Persecuted* in 1837 but its real odyssey begins with Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Is This Called Civilisation?* Indian

English drama could not progress for two decades after this as it was difficult to make a dialogue between Indians in the English language look natural and convincing. This difficulty was overcome by eminent playwrights like Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, the two great sage poets of India, who are regarded as the pioneer Indian dramatists in English. Thus, Indian English drama started making progress and pre-independent India witnessed the works of many significant playwrights like T.P. Kailasam, A.S.P. Ayyar, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharati Sarabhai. Rabindranath Tagore wrote mainly in Bengali but almost all his Bengali plays are available to readers in English translation. His prominent plays are *Chitra, The Post Office, Sacrifice, Chandalika, Muktadhara, The King of the Dark Chamber, The Cycle of Spring, Sanyasi* and *The Mother's Prayer,* and so on.

The Post-Independence Indian English drama benefited from the increasing interest of foreign countries in Indian English literature in general and Indian English drama in particular. A good number of plays by Indian playwrights were successfully staged in Europe and the United States of America. During the early Post-Independence era, a notable revival of Poetic Drama swept through English literature, attracting renowned playwrights such as W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot. However, amidst this resurgence of interest in poetic forms, Indian English drama emerged as a powerful force, making remarkable progress in its own right. Dramatists like Manjeri Isvaran, Nissim Ezekiel, Lakhan Dev, Gurcharan Das, G.V. Dasani, Pratap Sharma, Asif Currimbhoy, and Pritish Nandy made a significant contribution to uplifting the Indian English drama.

Literary theory in India is significantly venerable from ancient times. Panini, an ancient grammarian, contemplated literary theory as the fourth division of discourse. Bharata-Muni is admitted as the pioneer of literary theory in the Indian tradition. He wrote *The Natyaśāstra*, which is the source text of many literary theories. In the Indian context, poetics is a philosophy because poetics attempts to understand the experience of a work of art, produced in terms of various schools of philosophy. The works of poetics in India are exercised with the experience aroused in the readers/spectators.

Indian Poetics inherently indicates the concepts used in the literature of India to mirror its oneness and relevance. Indian Poetics is often known as Sanskrit Poetics which lays down principles and laws for the explanation of different literary forms. The notion of Indian Poetics is occupied by Sanskrit and Tamil literature. The Sanskrit phrase for literature is *Sahitya*, which dialectally means

‘adaptation’, ‘consistency’, ‘consonance’, and ‘intercourse’. What Aristotle defines as poetics, Indian Poetics provisions the same as *kavya*. The Sanskrit term, *kavya* is used for the broader exploration of literature. Sanskrit Poetics has been cultivated by different schools of thought which are as follows:

1. *Alamkāra* (poetic figures) school
2. *Rasa* (aesthetic pleasure) school
3. *Rīti* (style) school
4. *Guna* (attribute) school
5. *Dhvani* (suggestion) school
6. *Vakrokti* (obliquity) school
7. *Anumana* (inference) school
8. *Aucitya* (propriety) school

The Rasa Theory (*Rasa-Siddhānta*) occupied a prominent place among the schools of Indian Poetics and Bharata-Muni is recognized to be its pioneer. He has systematically expounded the Rasa Theory in his celebrated treatise on dramaturgy, *The Natyaśāstra*. The *rasa*s were recognized as an element of decoration by the *Acharyas* of the *Alamkāra* School, who did not give any over- riding attention to it. It was only with the passage of time and with the progress of analytical consideration, that *rasa* came to be identified as the fundamental element of literary formation. *The Natyaśāstra*, a major text of Indian *Kāvya-Shāstra* is the first discourse on dramaturgy in the Indian literary philosophical tradition. It is a scientific elucidation of drama, compiling distinct ideas and principles about drama as a form of art. The nature of drama, its origin, and objectives of drama, language structure, techniques, characters, types, and dialogue writing for drama are some points included in *The Natyaśāstra*. Its sixth chapter is an extensive study of Rasa Theory explaining the demonstration and occurrence of *rasas* and the types of *rasa*s.

The Sanskrit term *rasa* refers to taste, flavour, or essence. The concept of *rasa* is well known to all and is being used in connection with all forms of art. Bharata-Muni emphasises that *rasa* is a kind of sentiment, and it manifests through *sthāyibhāva* (dominant state). In *The Natyaśāstra,* defining *rasa* he writes, “The Sentiment is produced (*rasa-niṣpattiḥ*) from a combination (*samyoga*) of Determinants (*vibhāva),* Consequents (*anubhāva)* and Transitory states (*vyabhicāri-bhāva)*” (105). A literary work

with a good combination of these *bhavas* (states) becomes perfect, full of *rasa*, and pleasurable. It is *rasa* that renders all the elements *sarthak* (meaningful) in a literary work. In the essay *Rasa as a General Theory of Poetry*, V. K. Chari explains the Rasa Theory and says:

> Rasa Theory implies that there are a number of specific emotions, each with its distinct tone, and not an anonymous poetic emotion nor a host of nameless emotions. Poetic works are not merely emotionally charged in some vague sense like music or nonrepresentational painting but they treat human emotions: emotions are their representational content (101).

The theory not only highlights the significance of emotions in a work of art that attracts the audience towards itself but also forwards the idea that an artistic creation reaches fulfilment only when it possesses the power to appeal. This quality of aesthetic appeal is offered to a work via *rasa*. *Rasa* delights, shocks, and touches us intrinsically reminding us of the beauty of our being, and the sensibility of our emotions that makes us human. In this sense, *rasa* is found in the text. On bringing it all together, it can be said that *rasa* is essential to a work of art. It is the basis of all ideas and their communication. Thus, the infusion of *rasa* in a literary work or production is quite integral to the revelation of meaning and sense that is communicated to the audience/readers.

The eight *rasa*s (sentiments) initiated by Bharata-Muni, in the sixth chapter of *The Natyaśāstra*, are *Śṛṅgāra* (Erotic), *Hāsya* (Comic), *Karuṇa* (Pathetic), *Raudra* (Furious), *Vīra* (Heroic), *Bhayānaka* (Terrible), *Bibhatsa* (Odious), and *Adbhuta* (Marvelous). These Eight *rasa*s (sentiments) originate from their corresponding *sthāyibhāvas* (dominant states). *Śṛṅgāra Rasa* (Erotic) originates from the permanent emotion of *rati* (love). *Hāsya Rasa* (Comic) consists of the primary emotion of *hāsya* (laughter). *Karuṇa Rasa* (Pathetic) abides by the emotion of *śoka* (sorrow). *Raudra Rasa* (Furious) indicates the emotion of *krodha* (anger). *Vīra Rasa* (Heroic) incorporates *utsāha* (dynamic energy). *Bhayānaka Rasa* (Terrible) has *bhaya* (fear) as its permanent emotion. *Bibhatsa Rasa* (Odious) produces the emotion of *jugupsā* (disgust) and represents the incidents of disgusting and repulsive elements and the *Adbhuta Rasa* (marvellous) contains a permanent emotion of *vismaya* (astonishment).

Bharata's Rasa Theory was explained by distinct philosophers and rhetoricians after him. Other writers or philosophers whose contributions have been noteworthy to this tradition are BhattaLollata, Srisamkuka, Bhattanayaka, and Abhinavagupta. The theory of Abhinavagupta is much appropriated

and recognized till the present time. In his commentary on *The Natyaśāstra*, entitled *Abhinavabhāratī*, Abhinavgupta introduced a new *rasa* and named it *Sānta Rasa*. It contains the permanent emotion of *sama* (peace). This was accepted by most of the Indian literary critics and thus the concept of *Navarasas* (nine *rasas*) came into existence.

The Rasa Theory can be applied to any genre of literature. The present study attempts to apply the Rasa Theory to the plays of Chandrashekhara Kambar and Mahesh Dattani, two prominent playwrights in Indian literature.

Chandrashekhara Kambar (1937-) is a poet, playwright, folklorist, film director in the Kannada language, and the founder and vice-chancellor of Kannada University in Hampi. Kambar did his schooling in Gokak and returned to Belagavi for higher education at Lingaraj College. He did his research on *Uttara Karnatakada Janapad Rangbhumi* ("*The Folk Theatre of North Karnataka*") at Karnataka University, Dharwad. His plays mainly revolve around folk or mythology interlinked with contemporary issues, including modern lifestyle. He has been honoured with many prestigious awards including the Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri, and Sahitya Akademi Awards. He wrote plays, anthologies of poems, novels, and several research papers on folk theatre and literature.

His play *Siri Sampige* is a Kannada play based on a Kannada folk tale. It is written in the form of *Yakshagana*. It deals with the story of Shivanaga and his conflict with mind and body. The play narrates the story of a man who exists in a dual form – a prince and a serpent. The duality in the play is a result of the prince splitting himself into pieces with the hope of producing a female form that would complement him to perfection.

The next selected play of Kambar, *The Bringer of Rain: Rishyashringa*, originally written in Kannada, is a traditional folk play popular in Karnataka. It revolves around the myth of the sage Rishyashringa. According to this myth, the kingdom of Anga Pradesh was struggling with drought and famine, and the sage, using his spiritual powers, brought rain to this place. In the play, Balagonda, the chieftain's son is sent to a school away from his village, Shivapura, which is facing famine. The villagers are desperately waiting for his return thinking that he may redeem their hopeless condition devoid of creativity and fertility. Balagonda is utilized as Rishyashringa but soon villagers come to know that he is not as pure as Rishyashringa. The play is designed as an interplay between mythical

imagination and modern sensibility.

Another selected play of Kambar, *The Shadow of the Tiger* is a play based on a folk tale of demonic influence on the life of the villagers. The play revolves around bad omens, illusions, and reality. The village chief Gowda decides to go and capture the tiger which causes harm to the village folk. He goes to hunt the tiger, despite the warning of the stars, the anxiety of his wife who had a bad dream, and all other bad omens, resulting in separation from his supporters in the forest. He returns magically, claiming to have killed the tiger. The situation in the village changes drastically after Gowda's return and the villagers face misfortunes one after another.

Mahesh Dattani (1958-) is a multifaceted playwright, writer, director, and actor. He completed his education at Baldwin Boys High School before pursuing his studies at St. Joseph's College, Bangalore. While harbouring a desire to become a copywriter, Dattani obtained his post-graduation in Marketing and Advertising Management. His compelling plays delve into thought-provoking themes such as gender identity, gender discrimination, communal tensions, and various other pressing social issues. Dattani's talent extends beyond the stage, as he has also ventured into writing plays for BBC Radio. Notably, he stands as the sole Indian English playwright to have been honoured with the esteemed Sahitya Academy Award in 1998. Dattani's prolific repertoire encompasses numerous plays and directorial ventures, with his plays adapted into movies that have received accolades such as the prestigious Best Production of the Year Award by Sahitya Kala Parishad.

Tara, his selected play for the present study, tells the story of Chandan and Tara, who are conjoined twins. They both have a shared trait: a limp and an artificial leg, caused by their separation when they were young. Their separation brings a lot of chaos into the family. The play *Tara* is a play about the gendered self, about coming to terms with the female side of oneself in a world that always favours what's 'male'. The female character, Tara is discriminated against since her childhood and it continues even after her death. Chandan has changed their story into his tragedy. He apologizes to Tara for doing so.

The second selected play of Dattani, *Final Solutions* is a critically acclaimed and thought-provoking play that brings out important and representative features of the fragmented modern Indian life and poses varied questions of communal disharmony. The story revolves around the three

generations of a middle-class Gujarati family which saves two Muslim boys during a communal riot. The mob in the play symbolizes the communal hatred of the minority and the majority. *Final Solutions* makes us rethink our communal prejudices and perceptions. The play also highlights human weaknesses, selfishness, avarice, and opportunism. There are issues of class and community and the clashes between traditional and modern lifestyles and value systems reflected in the play.

Another selected play by Dattani, *Dance Like a Man* is a play in two acts. Its story revolves around three generations, their ambitions, sacrifices, struggles, compromises, and conflicts, and the way they try to cope with life; and mainly focuses on a couple who are dancers by profession. It explores the story of Jairaj and Ratna, the Bharatnatyam dancers, and also maps the struggles they had to face in the course of their Bharatnatyam careers. Amritlal Parekh, Jairaj's autocratic father opposes their dancing and becomes the epitome of patriarchal subjugation in the play. The play puts a question on a man's identity and his sexuality.

The literature review plays a vital role in assisting scholars by providing a comprehensive understanding of the diverse perspectives and topics that have already been studied. By engaging in a thorough review of existing literature, researchers can avoid duplicating previous research and gain valuable insights that can inform the development of a new and original research topic. Furthermore, it enables scholars to identify research gaps, unexplored areas, or emerging trends, allowing them to contribute to the existing body of knowledge with innovative ideas and fresh perspectives. A concise literature review of the existing studies and scholarly works pertaining to the selected writers is mentioned below:

Ashima Shrawan in the book *The Language of Literature and its Meaning: A Comparative Study of Indian and Western Aesthetics* published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK, in 2019, reflects the various concepts of Indian Poetics and compares them to the concepts of Western Poetics.

In 2018, Geeta Monga, in her research paper entitled *Reflection of Rasa Theory in Mahesh Dattani's Reflection of Thirty Days in September,* analyzes the elements of *Rasa* and *Bhava* in Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September*, a drama, presenting the agony of a girl who has been molested in her early childhood by her uncle.

In 2016, Avni Ajaykumar Shah from Kadi Sarva Vishwavidyalaya, Gandhinagar, Gujrat in his thesis

A Comparative Study of Use of Myth and Folk Traditions in Selected Plays of Girish Karnad and Chandrashekhar Kambar compares the selected works. He reflects on Chandrashekhar Kambar's illustrations used in myths and folk tales.

In 2016, Garima Chauhan from Jiwaji University, Gwalior, in her thesis entitled *Humanism in the Plays of Mahesh Dattani: A Critical Study,* analyzes the various aspects reflected in the plays of Mahesh Dattani and also explores the humanism reflected in the plays.

In 2000, Namita Srivastava from Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra in her thesis entitled *A Study of the Poetry of T. S. Eliot in the Light of Anandavardhana's Dhvani Theory* explores the concept of *Dhvani* Theory and also gives an overview of the Rasa Theory.

Kapil Kapoor and Nalini M. Ratnam in the book, entitled *Literary Theory: Indian Conceptual Framework* published by Affiliated East-West Press, New Delhi, in 1998, have analyzed and given an overview of Indian poetics and its theories. They talk about the concepts of *rīti- guṇa, vakrokti, alamkāra, dhvani, rasa,* etc.

M. S. Kushwaha in his book *Indian Poetics and Western Thought* published by Argo Publishing House, Lucknow, in 1988, compares Indian literary theories and Western literary theories. He writes about the various theories of Indian poetics like *Rasa- Dhvani* Theory, the concept of *Rīti- Guṇa*, *Vakrokti* Theory, the concept of *Alamkāra*, the doctrine of *Sādhārṇikaraṇa* and *Aauchitya*, etc.

In 1984, K. S. Arjunwadkar in a research paper published in JSTOR by Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute entitled *The Rasa Theory and the Darsanas* explores Rasa Theory and its philosophy as life's essential part.

In 1967, Tapasvi Shambhuchandra Nandi from Gujrat University in her thesis entitled *The Origin and Development of the Theory of Rasa and Dhvani in Sanskrit Poetics* explores how the *bhavas* get originated and what is their impact. She also explores how the development of Rasa Theory is influencing literature in the present time.

This literature review reveals that multiple studies have explored Rasa Theory and analyzed it from different perspectives. Several scholars have also applied this theory to various literary texts. Numerous researchers have extensively analyzed the literary works of Chandrashekhar Kambar, focusing on their intricate connections to myths and folk tales. Similarly, a handful of researchers have

undertaken comparative studies, juxtaposing the works of Mahesh Dattani with those of other prominent writers. However, to the best of my knowledge, no endeavour has yet been made to conduct a comparative study of the works of Chandrashekhar Kambar and Mahesh Dattani, using the insightful perspective of Rasa Theory.

Therefore, the present research applying Rasa Theory to the selected plays of Chandrashekhar Kambar and Mahesh Dattani will contribute to a deeper understanding of the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of these plays. It will provide insights into the application of Rasa Theory developed centuries ago in the contemporary literature. The study will also provide valuable insights into the works of two important Indian playwrights. Hence, it is hoped that the proposed study would open new frontiers of research in theory as well as contemporary Indian drama.

The objectives of the proposed study will be:

1. To explore the genesis, and evolution of Indian English drama.
2. To study the key concepts and principles of Rasa Theory in Indian aesthetics.
3. To identify and classify the predominant emotional states (*Rasas*) depicted in the selected plays of Chandrashekhar Kambar and Mahesh Dattani.
4. To examine the commonalities and differences within the framework of Rasa Theory in the respective works of Chandrashekhar Kambar and Mahesh Dattani.

Thus, keeping the objectives in mind, the proposed Chapter Scheme of the thesis would be:

Chapter 1- Introduction

Part A: Indian English Drama

Part B: Rasa Theory: Concepts and Principles

Chapter2- A Study of the Dominant *Rasas* in the Selected Plays of Chandrashekhar Kambar

Chapter 3- Interpretation of the Selected Plays of Mahesh Dattani in the Light of Rasa Theory

Chapter 4- Selected Works of Kambar and Dattani: A Comparative Perspective

Chapter 5- Conclusion

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